

ODYSSEY OF THE MIND



Outside Assistance Guidelines from Carole Micklus and the Odyssey of the Mind International Problem Captains

First, let's review the basics: Coaches have the responsibility to organize the team, to maintain order and discipline. They may serve as a "secretary" to a team (no matter what division) as long as they write only what the team members say. (However, for other official forms, coaches may write them out only for Division I teams.)

Coaches should always ask questions that get the team members to think about their solutions and how to improve them. However, they may not ask questions in a leading way, e.g. "Don't you think it would be better to narrate your play, rather than act it out?" The correct way to state the question would be, "What are some other ways you could present your play?" By asking broad questions, the coach stimulates the team members to think. This is the heart of the Odyssey of the Mind program.

Because coaches want to do their job, do it well, and never place a team in jeopardy due to their own misinterpretation of what Outside Assistance is or isn't, Odyssey of the Mind Association was recently asked to clarify just what does and does not constitute Outside Assistance in various scenarios.

Scenario	Question	Answer
For a Division I team, A parent plugs in a power tool for one of the students as it is a rule in their house that no children are allowed to plug in any appliance.	Is it outside assistance (OA) for any non-team member to plug in a power tool that the team uses to complete their solution to the problem?	No, the only prohibition against this would be if it were done during the timed competition period. The parent may not use the power tool to work on the problem solution.
A team decided they will revolve their skit around a CELL theme. The coach gives them a homework assignment to come up with all of the words they could with CELL in them like CELLOphane, CELLular Phone, etc.	Is it OA for a coach to give a homework assignment that gets the kids to think more creatively about an initial idea that they came up with?	Although the coach should not give any examples, the assignment is one of the types of things the coach should do.
Judge stops team's performance in long term because the vehicle used is marking the floor. Children are allowed to push. At end of performance parents standing outside the taped area lift the car to spare the floor.	Is it OA for any non-team member to help with props after the performance has ended?	No, the only time the team may not have help with prop movement is during the timed competition period. (You asked me to cite the pertaining rules -- I would ask where a rule exists that prohibits this.)
Coach and two team members (non-participants) watching their teams performance of long term solution.	Is it outside assistance for one of the nonparticipating team members to point out to the coach that the team forgot to use a prop?	No, so long as none of the performers hear the remark.

Four of seven team members on a team in one year build some backdrops for use in their presentation. These same four are on a team the following year with three new members.	Is it OA for the new team to use the backdrops built in the prior year? May a team use props from a prior year in any situation without incurring an OA penalty?	Props may be used from year to year as is ONLY if the team is of entirely the same composition. -- That is , no new team members and none that are no longer on the team. The work must be that of all the current team members regardless of when it was done.
Kids put 2 boards together perpendicularly (4th graders) with screws and nails, but it keeps falling apart.	Is it OA to ask an adult who is familiar with carpentry what kinds of things in carpentry can be done to brace the boards? (Going on the principle that if it can be found with research, an adult can tell them.)	An adult can tell and show the team members various ways to brace the boards as long as he/she does not show them specifically what to do for their problem solution.
During check-in the coach hands the paperwork to the pre-staging judge.	Is it OA for the coach to hand the paperwork to the pre-staging judge?	Although it is always good to have the team members hand in the paperwork, there is no prohibition against having the coach hand it to the judge.
As the team deliberates on what their solution will be, the coach asks questions to make sure that their solution is well thought out.	Is it OA for the coach to ask questions as the team is developing their solutions?	NO--that's what a coach is for!!
A Division I team is spray painting a prop.	Is it OA for the coach to hold a team member's hand for about 2 seconds (Out of a 30 minute job) to help show the proper way to spray paint?	Only if he/she is not spraying the item that will be used as part of the problem solution. He/she must use a another item (perhaps a scrap piece of paper or wood) to give this lesson.
A Division I balsa wood team has a sheet of paper describing the order to put weights on (smaller diameter first then larger, so as to allow hand grip space). Kids composed the form (came up with the idea) but coach actually wrote it.	Is it OA for a non-team member to write down the instructions used by team members during their presentation? Is this any different than the coach completing the style form for Division I?	As long as the team members provided the information, it is okay for the coach to write it out. -- It is NOT different from the rules for the style form.
A Division I team is brainstorming their solution.	Is it OA for the coach to write down their ideas for later review?	This is a good idea. The only rule surrounding this is that the coach may only write down what the team members say.
A division I team needs to move a 4'x8' sheet of plywood from the garage to a workshop area.	Is it OA for a non-team member to move the plywood for them?	No, this is OK
A team is working on a structure problem that can be reasonably broken into sub-components. The coach devises and builds a testing apparatus that allows each of these components to be tested.	Is it OA for the coach to devise and build these testers?	Yes, the team may use any types of devices to TEST their solutions. [Editor Note.] The above answer appears confusing saying that "Yes" it is OA, but follows saying it is OK to use any types. There is a similar question later on that would imply this answer was meant to say it is not OA and "Yes" the team may use these testers.]

A coach prepares a simple, generic demonstration of an engineering concept and that concept is immediately applied by the kids into their structural design (i.e. a simple demonstration of how a truss withstands lateral loads better than a frame).	Does the presentation of an engineering concept represent OA in this circumstance?	As stated, yes. The coach would have to present several options of construction. He/she could demonstrate how each fails, but the team members must draw their own conclusions
If an "engineering practice" is interpreted by a coach to make it applicable to the current problem (i.e. the engineering practice of material quality assurance could be translated into inspecting and sorting balsa prior to its use in a structure).	Does the interpretation of HOW to apply general engineering practice to a problem represent OA?	No, not as described
With proper training, it is possible to examine a structure and determine which element failed first and why.	Is it OA for someone other than a team member to examine a failed structure and provide this information for the team?	This person may tell the team members what part failed; however, he/she can not tell the team why it failed or what to do to keep it from failing in the future.
A team member tells the adult who is helping to stack weights that he is going to go help resolve a problem with a prop. The adult verbally acknowledges that statement with the affirmation "sure, go ahead".	Does this represent OA	No. The team member has made the decision to do this. It would be outside assistance if the adult said something like, "Weight placement is more important, just stay here and continue with this" or if the adult initiated the conversation by telling the team member to go help with the prop.
A younger sibling has been following with interest the experiments, designs and "tricks of the trade" of an older siblings team.	Can the younger sibling adopt the many "lessons learned" from following an older siblings team around for several years without incurring OA?	This is OK to do as long as the younger sibling does not produce exact thematic copies.
A team is getting ready for spontaneous competition. The coach picks problems for them to work that he/she thinks will be representative of the type they will get. The coach tells them whether they made a good response or a bad one. The team is given constant, direct feedback on the quality or lack of quality of their spontaneous solutions.	Is it OA for the coach to prepare their team for spontaneous competition in this manner?	No, a good coach would always do this
An team wants to paint some props. There is some paint that was left over from last year, but the colors were mixed by last year's team.	Would it be outside assistance for a team to use something that was made by someone else even though essentially the same thing could easily be bought by any team?	This is not outside assistance as it is not the prop itself.
Kids get to a competition and are uncrating their scenery and props (unscrewing the crates).	Is it OA for the coach to tell the team what order to do everything in (I know they can help do it but does a team member have to tell the adult to do it?). Can the coach point out things that broke and ask if the team is going to repair them? I don't know if it makes a difference, but this is a Div 1 team.	It is okay for the coach to tell the team what order to uncrate things. It is also okay for the coach to point out things that broke and ask if the team wishes to try and repair them. However, from that point on it is up to the team members to decide whether and how to make repairs. (This is true for any division.)

Coach asks each team member to read one of the elements of the problem and explain what it means.	Is it OA for the coach (Div 1) to write each element on a piece of paper and ask the team to group the elements so that they now have a bubble diagram which organizes the elements? Once the team organizes the elements, can the coach copy it down, make copies of it and distribute it to each team member?	(Any division) It is okay for the coach to write down the elements, ask the team to group them and copy the grouping and distribute copies to the team members. The coach may not add or change anything however.
Team is brainstorming about all the things that make you think of tropical islands.	Is it OA for the coach to put those ideas on a flip board for everyone to see.	This is okay provided the coach writes only the team members' words.
Team is creating the script (Div 1).	Is it OA for the coach to write down what they say so they can look at what they already have? (3rd and 4th graders simply can't write, yet.)	This is okay in any division provided the coach writes only the team members' words.
Div 1 team is reading the rule book and cannot figure out what will happen if they have printed materials for the judges to read.	Is it OA for the coach to help them figure out what the rule book is trying to tell them? Is it OA if the kids ask what the coach thinks it means? Is it OA if the team asks the coach what he/she would do if he/she were them?	The coach should help them interpret the rule book. The coach may tell the team what he/she thinks it means. The coach cannot tell the team members what he/she would do unless the answer is "write for a problem clarification." However, he/she should encourage the team to think about what it means first.
Div 1 team has decided to use what they think is tasteful bathroom humor in their skit. The coach has made sure everyone is aware of the rule about vulgarity.	The team doesn't think it's vulgar but does not have a clue what adults think is vulgar (TV examples abound in the arguments as examples of what adults think is acceptable). Is it OA for them to tell other adults what their jokes are and ask if they think it's vulgar?	No, this is okay to do.
The performance has been taped. Four kids think they need to schedule an extra practice; 3 think they do not. (Performance cannot be done with just 4.)	Is it OA for the coach to make the decision? Is it OA for the coach to say 'majority rules'? Is it OA for the coach to say they must come to a consensus (meaning every person but 1 must agree)?	It is up to the coach to make the decision or to decide on how the decision is to be made. Practice schedules are entirely within the coaches purview.
Team is at competition. They have composed the paperwork (Div 1) but coach has prepared it.	Is it OA for the coach to carry the paperwork on competition day? Is it OA for the coach to hand the paperwork to the judge? Is it OA if the coach asks how the team intends to organize the paperwork so they can find it to give it to the judge?	Although it is always good to have the team members hand in the paperwork, there is no prohibition against having the coach carry it and hand it to the judge. The coach may ask the team how it will organize its paperwork
Div 1 team is having major problems figuring out how to keep track of information for their cost form.	Can the coach ask what information they are trying to track, how best to track it and then prepare some sheets for them to use to write down all the information as they go? (Somewhat like the advanced coaches workbook forms)	Yes, the coach may do this.
A goal for a team was to learn to take a complex problem apart, test each component in a controlled manner and then reintegrate the resulting solution and validate that it performed as expected.	Is it OA for the coach to encourage the kids to approach the problem this way? Is it OA to build jigs or testers to facilitate testing the alternatives they come up with for their sub-components?	The coach may encourage the kids to approach the problem in this way and he/she may make any TESTERS needed. However, he/she may not make jigs as they are construction aids.

It is summer time and the short version of next years problems have been published, but the full version has not been published.	Are there any limitations on what a Coach can or can not do with regard to OA?	No--The rules are the rules all year.
A team observed another team dressed up in chicken costumes that did very well. The next year the team decided to dress up as chickens.	Is it OA (NOT creative) to observe successful performances in one year and copy facets of it in the next?	No, it is not Outside Assistance.
A local group of several different Odyssey of the Mind teams are convened for the purpose of practicing spontaneous problems. The coach of each team has prepared a different spontaneous problem to give to each of the teams.	Are the coaches in this instance providing OA? If not, and the coaches score the teams, is this OA? If not, and the scores are provided back to the teams, is this OA?	None of these circumstances is outside assistance.
Same as above, but the purpose is to practice each team's long term solutions and present them to all of the other teams.	As described, is anyone in this instance providing OA? If not, and the teams are scored, is this OA? If not, and the scores are provided back to the teams, is this OA?	The teams may present their solutions to each other and may be scored. They may be given their numeric scores but may not be given verbal comments. (Verbal comment would tend to give the team more specific direction in not only what category should be improved (indicated by the score), but what specific items or changes should be made (e.g. "Costumes were colorful, but all were alike so little creativity was exhibited")